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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA242, MARTINEZ CUENCA LAUDS U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ORTEGA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MANAGUA242	2007-01-26 22:56	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-04-25/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2743916.aspx>
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VZCZCXRO0276
PP RUEHLMC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000242

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2017

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SUBJECT: MARTINEZ CUENCA LAUDS U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ORTEGA
GOVERNMENT

REF: 2006 MANAGUA 2077 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) In Sandinista-dissident Alejandro Martinez Cuenca's recent meeting with the Ambassador, he applauded President Bush's "magnificent" decision to call Ortega before the inauguration, terming the gesture the "best antidote to keep Ortega from straying" and to check Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' influence. Martinez Cuenca characterized Ortega as chaotic, anarchic, divisive, and adverse to the "carpentry of government," while Ortega's wife Rosario is totally obsessed with control. He believes that President Ortega's "disastrous" inauguration and his government's efforts to consolidate power through emergency legislation have cost Ortega much of the political capital he acquired following the November election. He is confident that Chavez' ALBA will not complicate CAFTA as it is not a trade agreement at all. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 24, the Ambassador, DCM, and PolCouns met with Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) dissident Alejandro Martinez Cuenca, who applauded President Bush's "magnificent decision" to call Ortega a few days before the Sandinista leader's inauguration. Terming the U.S. approach "the best antidote to keep Ortega from straying" and to check Chavez' influence, Martinez Cuenca added that Foreign Minister Samuel Santos and Ambassador-designate Arturo Cruz have told him that they and President Ortega are very pleased with our positive overtures thus far, including President Bush's phone call, the bilateral meetings held with Ortega in Managua and Quito, and Assistant Secretary Shannon's skillful and constructive public remarks on the bilateral relationship. Martinez Cuenca commented that additional meetings, including an eventual meeting between the two presidents in Washington would contribute greatly to the positive bilateral relationship thus far. The Ambassador thanked Martinez Cuenca for his suggestions and assured him that we will seek other opportunities for engagement.

Kafka Comes to Managua

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¶3. (C) Sharing his views on Ortega's inaugural ceremonies, Martinez Cuenca opined that the events were "something out of a Kafka novel." He was uncertain whether the numerous protocol faux pas and delays were intentional, or rather, part of the FSLN's proclivity for improvisation, disorder, and informality, but clearly the outcome was disastrous. Allowing Chavez to steal the show and to attack the United States sent all the wrong signals, while inviting Iranian President Ahmadinejad to visit Nicaragua on the heels of Ortega's inauguration heightened anxiety, opined Martinez Cuenca. Even though Ortega's remarks were measured and he refrained from attacking the United States directly, Chavez' intervention sparked alarm. Martinez Cuenca also criticized Ortega for hosting Ahmadinejad, a leader of the Islamic world's extreme right whose regime discriminates against women and even makes them take separate elevators. As a leftist, Martinez Cuenca was "insulted" by Ortega's honoring the Iranian.

¶4. (C) Martinez Cuenca remarked that before the inauguration, Ortega had taken the right course: conciliatory messages and engagement with the international community and domestic and foreign private sectors that assuaged fears Ortega would reinvent the undemocratic Sandinista model of the 1980s. However, between President Ortega's inaugural fiasco and his government's efforts to quickly consolidate power through emergency legislation, Ortega has lost much of the political capital he acquired after his election, observed Martinez Cuenca.

He attributed another mistake -- the decision to move the Presidency to the Olaf Palme (whose refurbishment will probably raise government costs rather than reduce them) -- to Rosario's affinity for symbolism. In sum, the Nicaraguan government's (GON) only positive measure thus far is its decision to cut the salaries of the Executive's senior officials -- that and the appointment of Arturo Cruz (Reftels) to represent Nicaragua in Washington.

Confirming Libyan Influence

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15. (C) As for Ortega's cabinet choices and other appointments, Martinez Cuenca agreed that many of the new ministers are not particularly qualified or experienced, but they were selected for their loyalty. The Ambassador raised concerns regarding Ortega's choice of personal secretary --former Libyan/naturalized Nicaraguan Muhamad Muhktar Lashtar. Martinez Cuenca confided that Lashtar arrived in Managua in 1989 and reported directly to Moammar al-Ghadafi's security unit that operates independently from the Libyan government. Further, through Lashtar, Libyan monies have maintained Ortega for years and Ortega's national and popular council model is based on the Libyan "Green Book," claimed Martinez Cuenca. However, if pressed, Ortega will likely counter any criticism of his appointment of the Libyan by rationalizing his appointment of former Amcit/naturalized Nicaraguan Paul Oquist to head the President's "national policy" advisory council "compensates" for Lashtar. Law 290 and What to Do with Lenin?

16. (C) Expanding on the topic of the revisions to Law 290 (delineates Executive responsibilities, lines of authority) that the National Assembly passed earlier the same day (septel), Martinez Cuenca opined that Oquist was likely the author of this contentious initiative. He explained that Oquist had left Nicaragua after Ortega lost the 1990 election and his concept of Nicaragua had remained frozen in the past. He surmised that Oquist took the old Sandinista regime's antiquated organization chart and planned on transposing it into the new government; revising Law 290 was the mechanism to achieve this task. Martinez Cuenca believed that after opposition parties and civil society objected to a number of the more draconian changes that would consolidate Ortega's power, the GON retracted somewhat, and eliminated some of the more egregious revisions.

17. (C) Regarding the revision to Law 290 removing authority over Nicaragua's defense intelligence unit (DID) from the Ministry of Defense and shifting it instead to the Armed Forces, Martinez Cuenca believed that this revision arose out of a compromise between Ortega and Armed Forces chief Halleslevens. After Halleslevens rejected Ortega's proposal to appoint Lenin Cerna's wife Marisol Castillo to head the Defense Ministry -- in large part because the military would not accept Castillo's (and thus, Cerna's) control over the DID, Ortega offered to shift DID authority from the MOD to the military. With Hallesleven's objections resolved, Ortega might appoint Castillo as Defense Minister, remarked Martinez Cuenca. (Comment: While before the Law 290 revisions passed the Defense Ministry was authorized to oversee the DID, in practice, it was controlled by the military. Now the relationship has been formalized.)

ALBA Does Not Contradict CAFTA

18. (C) Martinez Cuenca gave the Ambassador unsigned copies of 13 of the 15 agreements Nicaragua signed with Venezuela earlier in the month. He explained that he obtained the documents from the Venezuelan Ambassador after his numerous attempts to procure the materials from the GON had failed. Martinez Cuenca remarked that Chavez' ALBA does not

contradict CAFTA and is not a trade agreement at all; rather, it is a statement of cooperation, a political device promising all sorts of benefits to Nicaragua. However, if Chavez' record for lots of talk and agreements and little delivery plays out in Nicaragua, Ortega may come up shorthanded and unable to meet his campaign promises to Nicaragua's poor, he said, adding that Ortega may already harbor doubts over Chavez' ability to deliver.

Not in Ortega's Interest to Free Aleman

19. (C) Martinez Cuenca shared our view that Ortega will not release Liberal Constitutional Party caudillo/convicted money launderer Arnoldo Aleman because he can still exploit him. However, Aleman's influence over his party remains a problem and the main impediment to Liberal unity, opined Martinez Cuenca, who added that Aleman's arrogance after winning the presidential election in 1995 had prompted him to pact with

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Ortega instead of "consulting with the people."
Who's in Charge?

110. (C) Martinez Cuenca downplayed somewhat the growing fears that Ortega is bent on imposing an authoritarian regime -- characterizing Ortega as "anarchic, divisive, and adverse to the carpentry of government." Ortega's wife Rosario, however, is another story; she is totally obsessed with control, while Ortega thrives on chaos and takes great delight in pitting members of his inner circle against one another, he said.

Comment

111. (C) Martinez Cuenca's assessment tracks closely with ours and a number of other reliable interlocutors. His approval of our stance thus far vis-a-vis the Ortega government is encouraging, as he knows how Ortega and his inner circle think and what motivates them. Chavez would like nothing better than for us to enter into conflict with Ortega and to reduce our footprint in Nicaragua. To the degree we can successfully engage Ortega, his cabinet, and FSLN lawmakers and cultivate common ground, we may be able to offset Chavez's influence here.

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